



Utility Tips for First Time Renters and Homeowners

Obtaining Service

Before moving out of your residence, contact your utility company about shutting off service to ensure you are not billed past your move-out date. Contact should be made 10 days prior to the date you want service terminated.

When moving into a new home or apartment, you should be familiar with your rental agreement and aware of your utility responsibilities; do not assume service will automatically transfer into the proper name. The earlier you request new service the better.

Prior to contacting your utility company to establish service, make sure you have:

- your correct address and/or apartment number
- valid identification— such as driver's license, passport or military ID
-Utilities cannot require a customer to provide his/her Social Security Number when applying for new service
- a signed copy of your rental agreement or deed

The Fair and Accurate Credit Transactions Act of 2003 is intended to prevent fraudulent activity and identity theft, making it necessary for utility companies to verify customer identification. Make sure to contact your utility company well in advance, so services will be ready to use upon moving in.

New customers may be required to pay a deposit, as a result of their records. Reasons may include an unfavorable credit rating, having an outstanding bill with the company, or filing bankruptcy within the previous six years; a letter of credit from another utility company may waive a deposit. Utility companies may also require payment of previous unpaid accounts prior to establishing service.

Customer Responsibility

If you do not receive a bill within the first or second month of living at a new address, follow-up with the utility company to verify service has been established in your name. It is important to be proactive to assure services are in the appropriate name so they will not be shut off. This also helps prevent a large bill from accumulating, as you will be responsible for payments from the time you move in.

When sharing a lease with multiple tenants you may request to have all names put on the utility account. This will prevent one person from being held responsible if there is ever an overdue bill.

Energy Saving Tips

spotlight

There are many ways to improve the energy efficiency of your new home or apartment. Some include insulating, sealing air leaks, and installing ENERGY STAR appliances.

Even if you are on a tight budget there are several things you can do to help lower your utility bills, such as washing full loads of dishes and laundry, and purchasing a programmable thermostat.

You can also replace incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescent light (CFL) bulbs, using about 75% less energy and lasting up to 10 times longer. For more energy saving tips visit www.energysavers.gov/tips.

Bill Payment

Utilities charge by the “billing month,” a 26 to 35 day cycle. You will receive a bill each month by mail, unless you agree on another delivery method, and will have 21 days from the date the bill was sent to pay in full.

In order to avoid late payment charges and shutoff notices, bills must be paid in full and posted on or before the due date listed on the bill. Payments can be made online, by mail, over the phone, or in person at a customer office or authorized payment center.

Utility Theft

The most dangerous form of energy theft is illegal connections, putting neighborhoods at risk with rigged wiring. However, energy theft is generally classified as any interference with a utility company’s ability to bill a customer.

For this reason, it is important to take responsibility for service from the date you move in. If your company says service is off but you’re using gas and/or electric, be sure to inform them. Keeping service on in the previous tenant’s name is also considered theft.

Energy theft is a felony and prosecutable by law. Utilities may pursue charges for all categories of theft, including tampering with or bypassing gas and electric meters.

Trouble Paying the Bill

If you have trouble paying your bill, contact your utility company to discuss payment plan options. Qualifying customers can also receive assistance from agencies such as the Department of Human Services, The Heat and Warmth Fund (THAW) and the Salvation Army.

For a list of assistance agencies in your area, contact your local United Way by dialing 2-1-1.

Further Assistance

The Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) staff can assist if you have difficulty resolving issues regarding your utilities.

If a problem cannot be resolved by speaking with your utility company, contact the MPSC:

- toll free at 800-292-9555;

- online at www.michigan.gov/mpsccomplaints;

- by mail using P.O. Box 30221

Lansing, MI 48909; or

- by fax at 517-241-6272.